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ABSTRACT

This paper describes cross-cultural orientation techniques used over an eight-year period with Americans preparing to work in Micronesia. The main idea was to teach language and cultural differences on an affective level before learning on the cognitive level took place. The language orientation component of the program had as objectives: a psychological awareness of the fact that English in Micronesia is a foreign language; an awareness of the difficulties in learning a foreign language; and an introduction to modern language teaching techniques. The cultural orientation objectives included an awareness on the part of the Americans of: their own culture; the hardship involved in island living; and the differences in attitudes toward such things as time and nature. A final summary includes the notion that successful adaptation to a foreign culture depends on the individual's personality and temperament, particularly his or her curiosity, flexibility, and patience. (AM)

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ON CROSS-CULTURAL ORIENTATION TECHNIQUES

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This paper will deal specifically with cross-cultural orientation techniques used by the author in the last eight years with American personnel who were preparing to assume duties and responsibilities in Micronesia.

Basic Assumptions

The first basic assumption was that the orientation was not an end in itself, that is, personnel were encouraged to not feel that once the orientation was over, then enough would be known about Micronesia. It was merely the beginning of a process which would continue throughout the duration of a person's overseas sojourn as well as a beginning of a process of continuing to learn how to learn about one's own culture and the other cultures which the person would encounter. It is so often the case that a person who attends a rather extensive orientation program is misled to believe that as a result of this orientation he has received all the knowledge and skills needed to cope with a new environment. Thus, he proceeds to the new area full of confidence in his newly acquired ability and knowledge and begins immediately to "assist" those islanders, who, in his belief, have long awaited his arrival.

The second assumption is that there are natural linguistic and cultural barriers built around different cultural groups, but that many people who have lived in only one culture do not recognize this fact. The purpose of the orientation was not to tear down or circumvent these barriers but to create an attitude within the person to accept his own barriers as well as to learn to recognize the barriers of the other culture and develop a healthy attitude towards these boundaries. Those of us who have lived in Hawaii know many Hawaiian loan words which we have incorporated in our own English language. One of these words which is frequently used is "kuliana," meaning one's own private domain or "turf." The old Hawaiians divided their land and households by building short lava rock walls separating the different households. These enclosures were called kulianas. They served the purpose of identifying one household from the other as well as establishing the identities of the different groups involved. It is interesting to note that the battles, wars and conflicts which the Hawaiians fought were not between households which were separated from each other by the "kulianas" but between islands and between neighboring villages that had no man-built barriers between them. The custom would support the old proverb which we have used for so long: "good fences build good neighbors."

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The third assumption is that culture is usually more effectively learned on the affective level rather than the cognitive level.[1] Thus, the orientations stressed mostly the affective presentation of new situations first and then later relied on more absorption at the cognitive level. Thus, less emphasis was placed on intellectualizing and more on feeling and doing. This report will be a composit picture of the six programs with which the author has been associated.

Participants

The 600 participants in this program were mostly American educators (and their families) in their thirties who had had several years of teaching experience and who had not been outside the continental United States. They were all bound for teaching and educational administrative assignments in the islands of Micronesia.

Staff

The orientation staff were composed almost entirely of native Micronesians from the various island groups or districts. They served as cultural consultants and language teachers. There was also a small group of Americans who have had experience in overseas living and had become somewhat cross-culturally sophisticated.

Duration of the Orientation Program

The duration of the orientation program was from two to three weeks.

The Orientation Site

Three different sites were used: rural Oahu, Molokai, and Moen (Truk district). Generally, the conditions were somewhat more primitive than what the participants would find at their assignment posts. The orientation sites were located on the beach or very close to it. The buildings were very crude and living accommodations were very simple. The site also provided the participants with an element of isolation and separation which would serve as a prelude to the new environment which lay ahead of them.

Language Learning and Language Orientation

Language is one of the "kulianas" which needs to be respected. The participants spent at least three hours a day learning the language of the people with whom they would be working. The first objective of the language program was to assist the participants with a psychological adjustment due to the fact that they would be working on an island where the language is a foreign language (to the participants) and English is learned as a second language by some of the inhabitants.

Americans often have an unconscious attitude that the world needs to learn to speak English. This attitude reveals itself in such statements as, "They don't even speak English there," a statement made by a visitor who had just returned from Taiwan. Or, "I know how to teach them English. I taught mentally retarded children in the states before I came here." Hence, many Americans who worked in Micronesia felt that the Micronesians were somewhat inadequate in their mental development because they were not able to speak English. In order to illustrate and help overcome this attitude in the Americans, the Micronesian staff at the orientation were instructed not to use English with the participants during the first three days. The Micronesian staff members pretended not to know English at all, or at least very little. This immediately plunged the participants into a completely foreign environment where communication was virtually

impossible without a dependence on an interpreter or some sort of a sign language. The participants began to experience the agony and misery of trying to learn a new culture and gain new knowledge and new skills without having the advantage of the most used medium of communication--language.

Soon the participants began to realize that they needed to establish some means of communication in order to be able to adjust to the new environment. However, it was very interesting to note that very few of them chose to learn one of the Micronesian languages. Instead, most of them launched on a campaign of teaching the "natives" English. Informal language classes were heard throughout the orientation campsite. One heard such statements as "This is a coconut"--"co-co-nut." "This is sand"--"s-a-n-d." "My name is George"--"G-e-o-r-g-e," etc. The level of frustration in communication continued to mount and the participants realized that they were indeed in a completely foreign environment. They began to feel that they were the foreigners. Nevertheless they continued to try to convert the "natives." One American lady who roomed with a Micronesian female staff member, after two days of relentless and vigorous attempts to teach the Micronesian lady English, expressed a note of glee and triumph when she reported her experience with her Micronesian roommate after asking "What time is dinner tonight?" Of course, the Micronesian had pretended not to understand. The question was repeated a second time louder and slower, "What time do we eat tonight?" Again, the Micronesian pretended not to understand. With the third attempt the American proceeded even slower and louder and added a few gestures. She pointed to her watch, to her mouth and to her stomach and then to the dining area. At this time the Micronesian pretended that she understood and answered by spreading the five fingers of her right hand to indicate 5 o'clock. The American then with great glee and relief expressed "Now, you're beginning to catch on." The whole incident, of course, infuriated the Micronesian roommate who was about ready to disregard all her pretenses of not being able to speak English and to reprimand the American for the insult. However, in the spirit of the orientation philosophy she managed to contain herself and to proceed normally.

A few participants chose to ignore the situation completely. They figured that if language was going to be a barrier, then it would be absurd for them to attempt to either learn the local language or to teach English to the Micronesians. Instead, they subconsciously banded together in a small group and proceeded to enjoy the delights and pleasures of their new environment by themselves.

At the end of the third day the "non-English speaking" Micronesians revealed their true identity and their excellent command of English. This revelation took place at an evening party which was given basically to boost morale and establish esprit de corps. The coordinator toasted a drink to the Micronesian staff. The Micronesians, in turn, accepted the toast graciously and one remarked in English, "It's about time somebody toasted for me." The American participants were pleasantly surprised and delighted to discover that the Micronesians with whom they would be working in the future did speak English and had already exerted great effort in learning the language.

The second objective of the daily language learning program was to provide the new participants with an opportunity to experience the difficulties of learning a second language. This was done so that they would be able to empathize with their Micronesian students who would be not only learning English but also learning other subjects in English.

The third objective was to introduce the participants to modern techniques of foreign language instruction. The participants had to realize again that in their new environment English is a foreign language and must be taught as a foreign language.

The shock of these techniques proved to be very effective in changing the attitudes of the Americans about the ability of the Micronesians to speak English. However, it did not eliminate the psychological block which many Americans have that languages are very difficult to learn and that is not really necessary to learn a foreign language since most

foreigners want to learn English anyway. Many of the participants become very effective teachers of English in their new posts in Micronesia, but unfortunately, very few continued to learn the local languages.

Introducing Participants to Some Basic Cultural Values

There were several basic cross-cultural objectives of the projects. In the first place, since one's own culture is learned subconsciously, the objective was to help the participants and the Micronesian staff become aware of their own cultures first. One of the methods used to achieve this goal was group discussions. The topic, such as family systems, was given by the project coordinator. Immediately the American participants wanted to know about family systems of the Micronesians. However, the Micronesians, as prompted, reversed the question and asked the Americans to tell them about their own family first. This, of course, put the burden of proof on the participants who had to investigate and verbalize their own cultural patterns. Then the Micronesians compared their culture with the Americans, beginning with the similarities and concluding with traits which were exclusively unique to their own cultures.

Following such a discussion during an orientation on the island of Truk, the participants visited the nearby villages and observed Trukese households and their patterns of interaction and then returned to the camp for more discussion of their observations. Through this technique some of the participants were able to delve very deeply into their own culture as well as into the new culture. Some were able to discover such intricacies as family member loyalty priorities. In an American nuclear family system the priorities of loyalties are first, spouses to each other; second, parents to children and children to parents; and third, siblings to each other. However, in a Trukese extended family system the hierarchy of family loyalties show first, siblings to each other; then children to parents and parents to children; and thirdly, spouses to each other. This was, of course, a profound discovery which not only affected their understanding of Trukese society but also influenced their mode of operation in the new school system.

Another technique used to create an awareness of cultural differences was to shock participants and to ask them to verbalize the effects immediately. For example, when it was discovered that many of the women participants were wearing either mini-skirts or very short-shorts, it was the responsibility of the project staff to familiarize all the participants with the body tabu systems of the Micronesian society and to make them aware that thighs are considered a tabu part of the body and are not displayed publicly. Our first inclination, of course, was to verbalize this fact to the participants and to acquaint them on a cognitive level. However, a technique on an affective level was chosen instead. During a group meeting when everyone rested on the grass listening to the cultural consultants, a female staff member appeared before the group to give her talk dressed in her village attire which was grass skirt with no top. After she addressed the group we discussed the reactions of the participants to this scene. Some of the comments were: "It wasn't necessary for you to do this. We could have waited until later to discover it for ourselves." "This was really great but I was too embarrassed to look." "I really wanted to gawk but my wife wouldn't let me," etc. We also discussed the nonverbal reactions to the scene, such as the shy peeker, the supposedly disinterested investigator, the nonchalant observer, etc. After the situation was thoroughly discussed, we mentioned to the group that the Micronesian men in the camp were also experiencing the same reactions, thoughts, and feelings by having to look at the tabu parts of the American women--the thighs. This knowledge was thus internalized on the affective level and the Americans immediately equated the breast in our society with the thigh in a Micronesian society.

Another technique we used was to encourage the Micronesian staff to operate in a predominantly American oriented environment but in a Micronesian manner. This is very difficult because for over 30 years the Micronesians have lived with Americans and have learned to behave in an American manner when with Americans. However, we made every attempt to put this technique into practice. One of the Micronesian staff members who

held language sessions on the grass next to the beach interrupted his language patterns by blowing his nose in a Micronesian manner. He placed his thumb on one nostril and blew very sharply through the other nostril, clearing his nose on the grass. At first, this was tolerated, of course, by the American participants, but later some became very disgusted, and finally one of the braver members in the group approached the Micronesian teacher and explained to him the effects of this unsanitary method of blowing his nose. The Micronesian immediately apologized and then requested that they demonstrate to him the way an American would perform the same function. This was done by one of the Americans who pulled out a clean handkerchief from his pocket. Immediately, the Micronesian reacted "And you carry that stuff in your pocket all day long?" What better way could the Americans learn that even matters of sanitation are culturally based!

The cross-cultural aspects of the program also sought to assist the American participants in overcoming their erroneous illusion that the Pacific Islands were an idyllic paradise where the natives live a very relaxed, lazy way of life. To do this we designated one day in the orientation as Micronesia Day. During this day the participants were to learn to live in a rural Micronesian fashion. This, of course, was accepted by all the American participants with great glee and indeed they looked forward to a really delightful experience. However, their pleasant expectations were interrupted when they discovered early in the morning that there was no electricity and no running water. Their morning routine was vastly interrupted and hampered by the absence of two basic elements which are taken for granted in their culture. They had to flush toilets with sea water carried in buckets from the ocean. The chores of shaving and washing required that water be carried from a central source. They discovered that a great deal of time and energy were used just to perform the basic, normal morning routines. Later they discovered that breakfast would consist mainly of coconuts. They had to depend on the Micronesian staff for instructions on where to look for the shellfish. Then again had to build a fire, husk the coconuts, grate the copra, squeeze the milk. All these tasks were difficult to perform and were extremely time-consuming. Their troubles were compounded by the fact that they were not able to tell what time it was since all their watches were deposited in the main office. This requirement allowed the participants an opportunity to learn to depend on nature (as is done in many parts of Micronesia) for their time measurements rather than the usual device to which they had become so accustomed.

After eating their first morning meal they immediately began to prepare the next meal. Again, much effort was expended in gathering firewood, climbing coconut trees, husking dry coconuts, preparing young coconuts for drinking, setting the net on the reef for fish, spearing fish, roasting breadfruit, etc. Needless to say, the second meal of the day was not ready until late in the evening. And to their chagrin, they discovered that they had not produced sufficient food to alleviate the hunger pangs generated by all this extra work. Thus, they retired to their dark shacks hungry, tired and somewhat disappointed.

The next day the participants discussed their feelings and reactions to Micronesia Day. They all concluded that island life is indeed a very difficult life and survival requires a great deal of work. They also discovered that Micronesians do welcome change in their culture which will provide them with some leisure time and an easier and a more comfortable life. The participants also mentioned it was really not necessary to have a watch to tell time. They discovered that it was possible to guess, rather accurately, the time of the day using such clues as the tide, the position of the sun, the intensity of the tradewinds and, of course, by their own biological clocks. Others also realized why Micronesians have only two main meals a day rather than the usual three. Some of the educators immediately realized the hardships that were imposed on the Micronesian families when they sacrificed their children's assistance to the new school system which required them to attend school daily. Other educators pledged not to saddle their students in Micronesia with homework knowing that it is rather difficult to study in the dark. Finally, they learned that many Micronesian students will have expended a great deal of energy before school starts and so will seem tired. This should not be mistaken for boredom or laziness.

We have mentioned a few of the techniques used to acquaint the participants with their own culture and to introduce them to another culture. By giving them vivid experiences in contrasting their culture with their new culture, we hoped to promote a healthy curiosity about and a desire to participate in their new cultural environment. Other cultural values covered during the orientations will now be discussed.

From a Land-Oriented Culture to a Sea-Oriented Culture

Great emphasis was placed on assisting the American participants who came from a land-oriented philosophy and culture to accept and live amongst people who, throughout the ages, have developed a sea-oriented philosophy of life. We attempted to internalize the following often-ignored facts in participants.

Geographic and climatic factors helped to develop these two different cultures. The Americans came from a large land mass situated in a temperate zone with four seasons. The dependable transportation system, beginning with the invention of the railroad, placed punctuality very high in the spectrum of cultural values. The Americans place great importance on being on time and a whole social structure has developed around a very specific time-oriented philosophy. Also, the four seasons have caused the culture to develop the notion of futuremindedness--planting, harvesting, storing--all requiring future planning. Today, the American society is extremely futureminded. Such plans as five-year plans, life insurance, social security, retirement, fringe benefits, etc., are indications of the individual's preparation for the future.

On the other hand, the sea-oriented culture does not have four seasons. The inhabitants see no necessity in slicing their time into very distinct periods and do not place punctuality very high in their value spectrum. In the past, when a canoe sailed from one island to another, the sailors had a general idea of how long it would take the party to arrive on the other island. It, of course, depended on the waves, currents, storms and other unforeseen elements. This notion of general time has prevailed until today. Pacific Islanders who work in an American context learn to abide by the notion of punctuality during the regular work week; however, they revert to their notion of time during the weekends and on holidays. Knowing this, we devised several techniques to assist both cultural groups to appreciate and tolerate each other's pattern of behavior. All participants and staff were required to remove any kind of timepiece for two days. During this period, the participants learned to organize their day based on nature itself--the sun, tide, and mostly, their own biological clocks. Initially, this caused a great deal of frustration and anxiety when time specificity was eliminated. Yet later, they submitted to the passive aspect of time and some even learned to appreciate it. Of course, children had no difficulty in accepting this new pattern since they normally operate on general time elements anyhow. It was much easier for them to adapt to a "Pacific-oriented" time philosophy. They even augmented their learning by measuring the tide with a notched stick stuck in the sand.

Another "time" technique was to announce a forthcoming interesting activity, presented by the staff, which would enhance the participants' understanding of the Micronesian cultures. A specific time such as 7:00 p.m. was announced. Thus, all the participants gathered at the appointed time; however, the staff did not arrive until half an hour to 45 minutes later. This type of situation was repeated several times. Initially, there was quite a bit of consternation on the part of the participants, but later they accepted the "Pacific time" not only cognitively but also affectively as well.

Also knowing that one of the American cultural values is to save time, we deliberately extended several sessions way beyond the time allotted for them. It was very interesting to note how restless and fidgity many of the participants became 5-10 minutes after the supposed quitting time had passed. Several began to leave slowly and others who remained, so as not to offend the Pacific Islanders, did so with great effort.

We also investigated the time value by reading and then discussing the following dialogue, which took place between a reporter for the Micronesian Reporter and Joseph Fanachoor from Yap:

Reporter: "Let me ask you to look into the future, and tell me what you think Yap will be like 10 years from now."

Fanachoor: "Ten years from now, I think--same way, same picture as now."

Reporter: "Do you think there'll be any changes at all?"

Fanachoor: "No. I think only expectation, maybe buildings. Government buildings will be changed, but nothing for us to change."

Reporter: "Every two or three years, the United Nations Visiting Mission comes through the Trust Territory, visits all of the districts, many of the islands and they try to find what are the needs of the people, what the people want, what do the people think. If you were asked by a UN Visiting Mission what the people of Yap want for the future, what would you answer?"

Fanachoor: "I think Yap people cannot answer that question you ask me. And myself, too, I don't know, I can't answer. Because, you know, I can't answer because I don't think I have ideas for next year. I don't know what's with the future. That's why the Yap people cannot answer that question. They asked us before, a couple of years ago, and nobody answered."

Reporter: "Is that because the people are happy or unhappy?"

Fanachoor: "We don't know. We're happy or unhappy, we don't know."

Reporter: "Are you happy?"

Fanachoor: "No, I don't know. I can't say that. You see whether tomorrow I am going to get sick or I am going to get well tomorrow. That's why I can't answer for a long time. New Year or in the future, I can't answer that. "You see, if I say yes, I'd like there to be a change tomorrow and maybe tomorrow I am going to get sick or something like that and I change my mind and I put my question in the paper, you know. So maybe tomorrow they're going to say 'You said that before and there is your question which you put down and now you change your mind and now it's very funny."

Reporter: "So it's hard to tell about the future?"

Fanachoor: "Yes, very hard to tell."

Mastery Over Nature and Harmony with Nature

Another conflict which had to be faced in our orientations was that many of the Americans are accustomed to mastering nature, while most of the Pacific Islanders have learned to live with the natural elements. A specific example which came into view

almost immediately was that the Pacific Islanders had no problem living with all the various insects that were present at camp; however, the participants demanded insecticides and other aerosols and objected to the "unsanitary" conditions of the camp. Another example was noticed when the participants would always scurry for shelter whenever it rained, but the Micronesian staff did not exhibit any immediate sense of urgency to get out of the rain.

This aspect of the orientation was accepted by only a few participants who managed to adjust to nature and adapted themselves to live within the context of their new environment. The rest prepared for battle and fortified themselves with the products of modern science and technology to fight insects, fungus, amoeba, hookworms, rats, cockroaches, decay, termites, heat, typhoons, tidal waves, etc.

The American participants are from a culture which is normally spared from the natural traumas of life such as birth and death. For the most part, they are protected and sheltered from these "unpleasant" natural events. To illustrate this point and in order to prepare them for a culture where such events are accepted as normal aspects of life, we brought a live pig to camp. For several days the participants fed and cared for the animal. Finally, next to the last day of the orientation, the pig, which had become somewhat of a camp mascot, was slaughtered and butchered for the final "luau." There was no effort made to obscure this activity or to protect the participants from such unpleasantness. In fact, it was done in plain view of all. Many of the women and some of the men participants objected to such cruel tactics and were very unhappy that their children had to be exposed to such "carnage." The children, on the other hand, very eagerly viewed the entire scene and some assisted with this chore. This technique, we believed, served a double purpose: (1) it exposed the participants to a certain reality of life which many of them had not experienced before, and (2) it rather forcefully caused them to accept a new pattern of culture where people do not humanize animals and do not hide episodes of birth and death.

Entertainment

Americans are used to buying their entertainment, while Pacific Islanders are used to making their own entertainment. During the evenings, the American participants would gather around Micronesians who were entertaining themselves with songs and dances and slowly began to involve themselves in the activity. Those who did not participate voluntarily were gently coerced by the Pacific Islanders to join. In addition, we also exposed the participants to the wonders of their new marine world and introduced them to the adventure of the ocean through the mask and snorkle. This opened them to new vistas of leisure time activities such as shelling, spearfishing, coral reef exploration, etc.

From a Paper-Oriented Philosophy of Administration and Education to a More People-Oriented Pattern of Learning and Action

Throughout the program there was less emphasis placed on paper and books and more emphasis placed on learning from people. All language learning and all cultural learning on the cognitive level was done through sharing with colleagues and with island counterparts rather than through books and written materials. The participants began to depend on their inquisitive resources and initiative more and more for their learning rather than dependence on the paper handouts to which they were normally accustomed. In addition, through this technique, they began to realize that as educators their responsibility was education with the Pacific Islanders, rather than for the Pacific Islanders, as they were led to believe before they departed their homes.

Summary

1. Affective cross-cultural learning was emphasized and preceded the cognitive learning aspect.

2. The orientation was only the beginning of a process of experience which would continue throughout the participant's tour of duty in the new cultural area. This was emphasized so that participants would learn how to avoid becoming only passive observers of the Pacific Island cultures.

3. The training site provided the participant with the separation and isolation needed to cope with their new anxieties. It also provided them with a simulation of a new marine environment and provided them with a setting for an "ocean-oriented" style of living.

4. Emphasis was placed on assisting the participants in transporting themselves from "land-oriented" attitudes and frames of mind to "sea-oriented" behavior.

5. To provide an increase in frustrations and the expected adjustment, the normal daily comforts which Americans take for granted were slowly withdrawn.

6. Daily life was closer to nature so as to encourage the participants to learn how to harmonize with nature instead of continuing to harness and fight nature.

7. Participants were encouraged to depend on their own inquisitive resources and initiative for learning instead of depending on experts and authorities. Emphasis was placed on discovering and solving rather than just solving known problems.

8. There was a gradual change from a "specific" time orientation to "Pacific" time style.

9. A deliberate emphasis was made on helping the participants to shift from their "paper culture" to "people culture."

10. There was less importance placed on intellectualizing and more given to doing. Factual information was presented through case studies, role playing and informal conversations. This helped the participants to act on the ideas instead of just talking about them.

11. An attempt was made to develop positive attitudes and a healthy curiosity instead of only trying to shatter cultural barriers and dividers.

12. Activities were organized to help participants to understand their own cultural biases and to become aware of their personal reactions to differences.

13. Participants were introduced to the new notion of arriving at solutions through "feeling" and not so much through "facts."

Our experiences have shown that traditional academic disciplines are not directly relevant to performance in an alien culture. Success or failure in the orientation, as well as in the adjustment of the person in his new environment, depends on the individual personality and temperament. The capacity for adaptation and adjustment depend to a

great degree on the reality of expectation. We strived to create within the orientation participants a healthy curiosity, a willingness to try to learn and understand and, most of all, patience. After several years of orientation programs and a good deal of evaluation and follow-up on the participants, we feel that the techniques we used proved to be beneficial in meeting our objectives.

FOOTNOTE

[1]A very readable treatment that defends this assumption is available in Eliot Aronson's book, The Social Animal, published in San Francisco by Freeman and in New York by Viking Press, 1972, Chapter 8 [Editor].